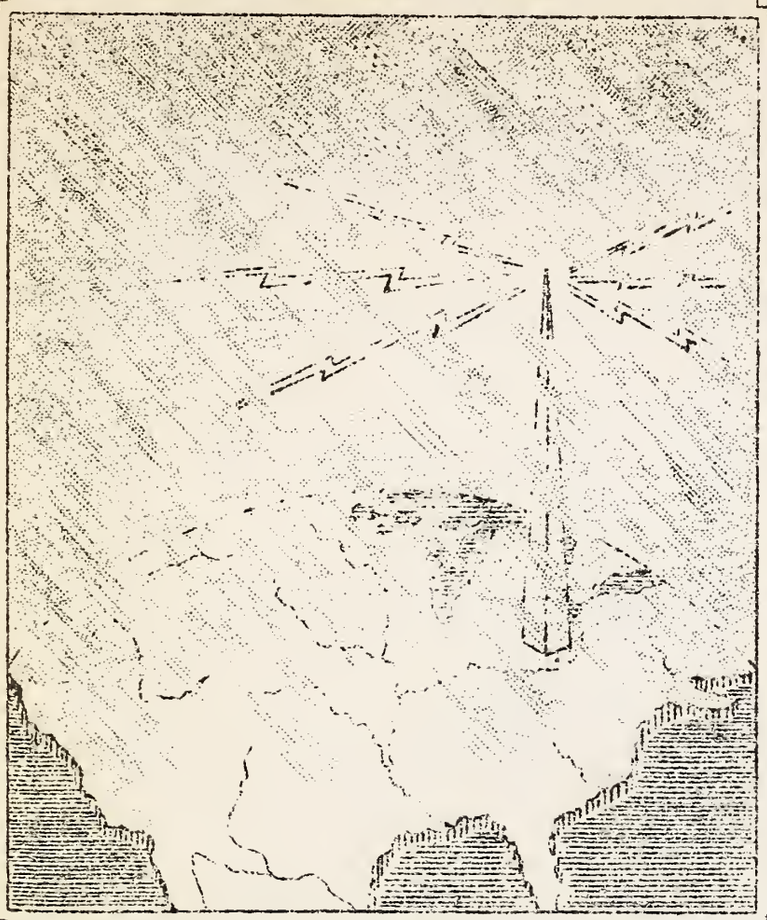

FORTUNES WASHED AWAY

"DRAINAGE IN
VAN WERT COUNTY"

Broadcast No. 6 in the third year
in a series of dramatizations
of better land use

WLW, Cincinnati

June 1, 1940 1:15-1:30 pm.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
DAYTON, OHIO

SOUND: Thunder and rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN THEME: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

A farm boy named Isaac Van Wart never saw the lovely Ohio County that now bears his name. He never saw the delicate shadings of color that mark the peony, a blossom that Van Wert County has changed from a garden flower to a commercial enterprise. He never saw the orchards Johnny Appleseed left behind as twilight's shadows dimmed his path across the Northwest Territory, nor the fields of corn and wheat and meadow, nor the historic Ridge Road that crosses Van Wert County of today. But this rich agricultural county still honors the name of the lad who, with John Paulding and David Williams, was playing cards in a New York thicket in 1780....

SOUND: Slap of card being played....

ISAAC

Oho! So that's your game, is it?

PAULDING

Think twice before you play, my friend. Nay, think even again!

ISAAC

By the great hornspoon....listen!

SOUND: Horse walking slowly...growing nearer...

WILLIAMS

IT's a man on horseback.

ISAAC

He isn't armed. Probably a lost traveler..

PAULDING

I don't recognize him.

ISAAC

He must be one of our patriots. See, that brand..."U.S.A." on the horse's flank.

WILLIAMS

We mustn't take chances. Let's investigate.

ISAAC

Come on! Get your muskets. (shouting) Hold up, there!

SOUND: Horse comes to stop.

ANDRE

Good morning, gentlemen.

ISAAC

And who might you be?

ANDRE

The name, John Anderson. And gentlemen, I hope you are of our party.

PAULING

What party?

ANDRE

The lower party, of course.

PAULDING

We are of that party.

ANDRE (with relief)

Good. I am a British soldier. I have been up the country on particular business, and do not wish to be detained a single moment. Please step aside.

PAULDING

Just a moment. We are Americans.

ANDRE

Oh? Why..you see...I'm really a Continental officer -- on my way to Dobbs' Ferry to get information from below.

ISAAC

Then why did you say you were a British officer?

ANDRE

Gentlemen! Don't you trust me? Here -- here is my pass, signed by General Benedict Arnold.

PAULDING

Give it here. Mm-Mm....it looks all right.

ANDRE

Then come, come, gentlemen! I am in great haste.

ISAAC

Just a moment, please. Your manner is most charming, Mr. Anderson. In fact, a bit too charming. Get off that horse!

SOUND: Clinking of harness, as he dismounts...

ANDRE

This is preposterous! General Arnold will hear of this.

ISAAC

These are perilous times. We never know who our friends are -- until they stab us in the back. Look in the saddlebags, David.

WILLIAMS

I did. Nothing there.

ISAAC

Nothing in his clothes.

ANDRE

And now, gentlemen, if you have finished with your search, may I have the honor to be on my way?

ISAAC

Perhaps we were wrong, Anderson. Our pardon.

PAULDING

One moment. Take off your boots.

ANDRE

Enough of this!

PAULDING

Go ahead. Take off your boots.

ANDRE

But this marshy ground. I'll catch....

PAULDING

Take off those boots.

ISAAC

Here. I'll help. (grunts)

PAULDING

What's this? Sheets of paper?

ISAAC

Give them here, John.

ANDRE

Gentlemen, upon my word, those are purely personal papers.

ISAAC

Are they, though? From General Benedict Arnold, to Major John Andre. Look here! According to this, General Arnold plans to turn West Point over to the enemy!

PAULDING

It can't be!

ANDRE

Gentlemen, let me explain. I am Major Andre. Now I can see that you are clever lads. I will give you a hundred guineas if you will permit me to be on my way.

PAULDING

And so you're a spy.

ANDRE

Let's not use that word, gentlemen. I am an envoy of my government. I'll make it a thousand guineas...

PAULDING

.....a spy!

ANDRE (with alarm)

Ten thousand! Ten thousand guineas and all of the dry goods you need!

ISAAC

Not for a hundred thousand, John Andre. You are going to the nearest army post!

ORGAN: YANKEE DOODLE, fading...

ANNOUNCER

Thus came fame to an obscure farm boy, Isaac Van Wart, a name the years changed to Van Wert. Fame came to Van Wert County in Ohio through another reason, prosperous agriculture. The Great Black Swamp was drained, crops and livestock drove out the trees, the grasses, the browsing deer and buffalo. And in recent years, Van Wert county gained fame through still another reason. At the turn of the century, Clara Anderson was admiring her garden, when her neighbor, L. J. Germann, walked by.....

GERMANN (laughing)

Miss Anderson, I do declare, you're in your garden from early morning 'til twilight.

CLARA

I get much pleasure from these flowers. There is nothing quite so lovely as a rose in bloom. Look at this one.

GERMANN

I'll agree, it is a rare beauty. And I share your love of flowers -- or for that matter, love of all things that grow from the soil.

CLARA

You must have inherited that from your father.

GERMANN

Father was a real farmer. I would not be surprised if he were not the best farmer in Harrison township.

CLARA

So I've been told.

GERMANN

Yes, he took a rich farm, and instead of mining it for all it could give, he spent many years building it up. He said his soil would never decline -- and he proved it.

CLARA

Many another farmer should match his example. I have heard of how farmers in other parts of the country are even abandoning their lands -- letting them wash away as if there were plenty of good land.

GERMANN

It's a bad omen. Father was very careful to drain the wet lands, and protect the slopes with meadow and trees.

CLARA

I suppose you will laugh at me, comparing my garden with the farm, but I try to take good care of this soil, too.

GERMANN

That's nothing to laugh about.

CLARA

I feel this way about it. We have in Van Wert a potential paradise. Productive farmlands in the country, beautiful gardens and parks in the city. Now, my flowers...roses, Bleeding Heart, Columbine, Bouncing Bet....

GERMANN

.....gate flower....

CLARA

And that reminds me. I've been having quite a correspondence with Mrs. Sarah Pleas, about flowers.

GERMANN

Pleas....I don't know her.

CLARA

She lives at Spiceland, Indiana. She writes continually about her lovely peonies...says they're her most precious possession.

GERMANN

Why don't you try them out yourself?

CLARA

Well, she doesn't like to travel, and neither do I. We just never have gotten together.

GERMANN

Hmm...peonies...Spiceland isn't so far from here. How would you like for me to drive over some Sunday and bring back a few samples?

CLARA

Oh, Mr. Germann...if only you would!

ORGAN: IN A LITTLE DUTCH GARDEN...fading...

GERMANN

Miss Anderson, here's something that should warm your heart.

CLARA (gasping with admiration)

Oh..Oh..Oh, Mr. Germann! Peonies!

GERMANN

Aren't they beautiful? This is the one Mrs. Pleas calls the "Jubilee." It bloomed first on the 50th anniversary of her wedding.

CLARA

The Jubilee. I have never seen anything like it.

GERMANN

I brought back some tubers for you...and, some for myself, and some for Lee Bonnewitz. Mark my words, Miss Anderson, someday you'll see peonies growing all over Van Wert.

CLARA

The Jubilee. It must be the queen of all flowers.

ORGAN: IN A LITTLE DUTCH GARDEN, fading...

GERMANN

Here's something that ought to be of interest to you, Miss Anderson.

CLARA

What is it? Oh, a telegram.

GERMANN

It's from Lee Bonnewitz. He entered the Jubilee at the National Peony Show, and it's been judged "finest flower of the show."

CLARA

I'm so glad. Yet, somehow I knew there could never be a flower so beautiful.

GERMANN

There's more to it than that. Do you realize how many people around here are growing peonies? Why, there are thousands of varieties in private gardens, and peony production is becoming a commercial enterprise on more farms every day. I was just telling Ford Owens about this award -- thought he might want to put a piece in the paper about it -- and he said that Van Wert ought to have an annual peony festival.

CLARA

A splendid idea...splendid.

GERMANN

Can't you imagine it? Thousands of people coming here every year? They could drive through our farmlands -- and see the most fertile land in all Ohio, land whose productivity has been assured by proper treatment. Then they can come into Van Wert and see our gardens -- our peony gardens, living symbols of man's guardian - ship of our life blood -- our soil.

ORGAN: IN A LITTLE DUTCH GARDEN.

ANNOUNCER

That is the true story of the background of Van Wert's annual Peony Festival. And now, for more background we turn to the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and here is Ewing Jones.

JONES

Thanks, _____. Van Wert held its first festival in 1932, and the ninth will be held next Tuesday and Wednesday. Remember that it takes good soil to grow good peonies, just as it takes good soil to grow any kind of crops continually.

ANNOUNCER

And as I understand it, artificial drainage is responsible for much of the agricultural development of Van Wert county. Didn't it used to be part of the "Black Swamp", and a part of the bed of ancient Lake Erie?

JONES

Yes, in those days the land was submerged all year long. Then artificial drainage came into the picture, costing millions of dollars for construction of the ditches and the expense of maintenance. But look what Van Wert county received in return.

ANNOUNCER

A mighty fine farming center, no two ways about that. Is there any other cost in drainage?

JONES

Oh, yes...open ditches are just part of a drainage system. There is the cost of providing for agricultural drainage in removing excess water from the soil. Tile drainage usually is the only practical means of accomplishing this. Organized drainage districts in recent years have been able to receive help through cooperation with CCC camps, such as the one near Middlepoint, in Van Wert county. This camp has been working in Van Wert, Putnam, Paulding, Allen, Auglaize, and Mercer counties, helping drainage districts improve their farmlands.

ANNOUNCER

Well, here's one question I've been wondering about: what's the connection between drainage and soil erosion?

JONES

It's a matter of proper land use, _____. By draining the lowlands, we don't need to crop so many steep or rolling lands that are subject to soil erosion. We can keep them in pasture or meadow or woodlands, and confine our cultivation to the more gentle lands where soil erosion is a minor factor.

ANNOUNCER

I see, Ewing, this question may seem absurd on the surface - of course better drainage systems improve crop yields. Can you give me a concrete example?

JONES

Oh yes. I know of one farmer near Helena, Ohio, but I don't know if he'd want us to use his name or not.

ANNOUNCER

Then just refer to him as John Doe. That's been done before -- once or twice.

JONES

All right, but just remember that this particular "John Doe" is a real farmer.

ANNOUNCER

Now, how about his story.

JONES

In 1929 Mr. "Doe" bought 60 acres of untiled land in the western part of Sandusky County. This plot of land never had been tiled, because it had been farmed entirely by tenants. Up until that time this land had produced average crop yields in dry years, while in wet years wheat would average around 12 bushels per acre, and corn would seldom go beyond 30 bushels per acre.

ANNOUNCER

Well, if I were in Mr. Doe's shoes, I'd do something about that condition.

JONES

He did. He spent around $2,100 tiling this land..that cost him about $35 per acre. Since the farm was tiled, Mr. Doe has received as high as 60 and 90 bushels of corn per acre, and 47 bushels of wheat to the acre. In fact, the lowest wheat output was 28 bushels. So, _____, there you have a typical example of what planned drainage means to the average farmer. It's nothing more than proper land use.

ORGAN THEME: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

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